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ABSTRACT

Factors promoting or detracting from the effectiveness of collaborative projects between colleges and schools were investigated. Of concern were three projects undertaken collaboratively between a four-year state college in Massachusetts and the local public schools during a 2-year period. The In-service Project provided opportunities for teachers and administrators to have consultants' help with curricular concerns. The Writing Project involved research on whether fourth and fifth grade students' writing ability could be improved through the acquisition and use of word processing skills. The third project, Databus, is a mobile computer laboratory that circulates among rural schools to provide instruction in the educational application of computers. Descriptive data were gathered through questionnaires, surveys, interviews of teachers, students, administrators, and the writing samples of fourth graders. Findings are presented along with five recommendations including: a joint assessment of public school needs and ability of the college/university to respond to the latter must occur prior to design; representatives of all collaborative parties must agree on project goals, work plan, implementation, and evaluation in the developmental stage of the proposal; the Education Department and/or other relevant college departments must be prepared to give faculty members either additional stipends and/or load credits; the public schools must prepare its staff regarding the projected administrative and instructional impact of the upcoming project; and the college/university must be committed to the collaborative ideal and provide financial support if necessary. (SW)

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The Collaborative Design in Advancing the School/College Interface

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The Collaborative Design in Advancing the School/College Interface

Much attention has been focused on the value and the importance of collaborative projects between institutions of higher education and schools. Collaboration between different types of educational institutions has a historic precedent (Lieberman, 1986; Maeroff, 1983), but a new urgency. Notes Maeroff (1983),

> Representative of higher education and the public schools are taking notice of each other, with and without the prodding of legislators. Discussion of mutual problems has begun, and there is tacit acknowledgement that it is time to overcome the distrust that has proved so obdurate a barrier to cooperation....college and school educators are showing more interest in each other. Conferences, conversations, and collaborative projects are cropping up from coast to coast. (p. 1-2)

Since 1984, the Board of Regents of Higher Education in Massachusetts has demonstrated such an interest in fostering partnerships between schools and colleges. Yearly allocations of 3.25 million dollars have supported school-college collaborative projects designed to improve the quality of education in the public schools.

This paper describes the experiences of three projects undertaken collaboratively between a four year state college in Massachusetts and the local public schools during a two

year period. The overall thrust of the collaborative projects was twofold. First, teaching and learning within the schools would be improved. Second, a college/school interface would develop to facilitate the work of future collaboration.

It is the focus of this report to examine whether the benefits of a collaborative approach were realized across the three projects. Thus, the study investigates collaboratives-what factors in the experience of the three projects have been found to be beneficial or detrimental. Also sought were specifics on the elements that make collaboratives strong, viable, and able to meet the needs of all parties.

Method

The study is based on descriptive data gathered through questionnaires, surveys, interviews of teachers, students, administrators, and the writing samples of fourth graders. In this section, the projects first will be outlined followed by the method used in the evaluation of each project. However, the intent of this paper is not to examine each project separately, but to illuminate factors which contribute to or detract from the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts.

The three projects administered within this study were collaboratives with very different objectives. The In-Service Project, which ran for one year, provided opportunities for teachers and administrators to have consultants assist them with curricular concerns. The Writing Project spanned two years and was involved with research

investigating whether fourth and fifth grade students' writing ability could be improved through the acquisition and use of word processing skills. The third project, which continues, is the Databus. Based on the public library concept of the bookmobile, the Databus is a refurbished school bus equipped with five microcomputers, more than 800 pieces of educational software, and a library of related books and numerous handouts and catalogs. This mobile computer laboratory circulates among rural schools giving educators opportunities to preview material and receive instruction in the educational application of computers.

Both the In-Service Project and the Databus Project evolved out of the stated needs of the teachers and school administrators. With each of the projects, participation was voluntary although some school administrators made it mandatory that their teachers participate in the Databus Program. Evaluation was conducted using questionnaires and evaluation forms, as well as follow-up interviews. Fourteen workshops were involved in the Inservice Project serving 477 participants. The Databus Project has included 600 teachers representing 20 area schools within 13 districts.

The Writing Project was designed much differently. Instead of the college and schools working together in filling in-service training needs, college and area schools were asked to collaborate on a research project. The Writing Project was developed to investigate whether teaching word processing skills to mid-elementary children would

positively affect their writing ability. Pre- and post-writing samples were collected each year to determine if writing ability was affected through the use of computers. A survey the first year with interviews the second year were used to determine student attitudes toward computers and the subject writing. Teachers also were surveyed and interviewed as to their attitudes toward computers and their overall reaction to the collaborative Writing Project. Over 500 people took part in the Writing project involving students, teachers, administrators, college faculty, and student teachers.

Findings

Data gathered through interviews and evaluation forms indicated that participants believed they benefited specifically from the Databus visits, the word processing training for the Writing Project, and the series of workshops presented by the In-Service Project. All projects were regarded as being stimulating and/or helpful. Although many issues were involved in the research of the Writing Project, students' writing ability did significantly improve and students' attitude also reflected a positive view of both computers and writing. Additional positive outcomes included children having access to computers who would not have otherwise, teachers from different schools working collaboratively among themselves developing a writing curriculum for use on the computer, and student teachers being able to work with learners in a tutorial situation and learning methodologies relevant to individualized instruc-

tion. On the college level a college course in using word processing with children was designed and a computer science minor was developed which could be selected by education majors.

Although overall results were positive, factors did emerge throughout the operation of the projects which overshadowed the potential effectiveness of the collaborative. Of particular importance was the way in which the collaborative was generated.

The idea for the workshops within the In-Service Project and the entire concept of the Databus emerged from local school administrators and teachers themselves. Hence, the creators were also the participants. With the Writing Project, the idea first surfaced from college adminstrators. Once the Writing Project was funded the cooperation of college faculty, school administrators and teachers was sought. In this project negative side effects emerged, especially in areas pertaining to the implementation of the research project. Consistency of treatment in how long each student worked on the computer and on what activity was impossible to achieve. Some cooperating teachers were not careful in keeping records or in having their students complete the questionnaires which assessed attitudes. A lack of enthusiasm by some cooperating teachers resulted in their learners not having significant access to the machines. Insufficient numbers of education majors enrolled as student teachers resulted in the inability to cover all participating

classrooms. The lack of commitment of some Education Department faculty led to poor advising of college students. Consequently, few college students signed up for a practicum which was to provide the instruction for word processing to the elementary students.

It appears then that how a collaborative is generated is significantly important. Projects which are introduced and planned from the outside-in are least effective in reaching the goals of improving teaching and learning, and, linking the college and area schools together. Of equal importance is whether demands will be placed on the teachers, such as what was requested of them in the Writing Project to implement the research. Teachers are feeling constrained already. Further requests are viewed as burdensome and those requests are the first to be forgotten. The situation in which demands are imposed from without will feel the most resistance. Lack of input from teachers, or any prospective project participant, will later cause resentment and resistance to cooperate even if the project is seen as a positive one.

Discussion

Recent educational publications and national reports indicate a radical change must occur in teacher-preparation and continuing in-service education if our nation's schools are to improve. Both the Holmes and Carnegie Reports recommend the establishment of "clinical" or "professional development" schools based on the model of teaching hospitals, linking educators in both the university/college and

public school (Keppel, 1986). This idea is not really new or earth shaking, yet collaborative endeavors between colleges and public schools are in the embryonic stage with much future growth anticipated. The problem has been how to achieve a successful collaborative relationship between these parties.

DeBevoise (1986) had observed that, public school personnel often have unrealistic expectations concerning the time constraints upon professors, and college/university personnel often fail to realize that "school teachers do not have a portion of their time allocated to research and service" (p. 11). With these unrealistic expectations come frustration and a sense that the collaborative is not accomplishing what it was suppose to accomplish. As Trubowitz (1986) straightforwardly states, "they (public school and college educators) need to know what to expect" (p. 19). Once both parties have realistic expectations perhaps the characteristic which Goodlad (1986) believes to be essential "a measure of selflessness on the part of each" will be fostered which will "assure the satisfaction of self-interests by all involved" (p. 1).

Maeroff (1983) has contended that the initial step to effective school/college collaboration is the recognition of the commonality of problems. While that point may seem obvious, "the harsh truth is that many educators are convinced that they can go it alone" (p. 3).

Perhaps Hord (1986) offers a model which may help in

securing initial input from all factions in the developmental stage of the collaborative proposal. In Hord's collaboration model three initial organizational components are outlined:

> 1. Organizations agree on an exchange of tasks, each offering the other a product or service.
>
> 2. Organizations join forces...to plan and execute the design of the shared project. A "joint staff" system develops.
>
> 3. Organizations agree on projects results, outcomes, products, services... (p. 24)

Another issue relating to the "how" of conducting effective collaboratives has been the staffing problem. Collaborative efforts involving Education Department faculty can be impeded by FTE requirements, rigidity in the semester arrangement (Fall/Spring) of courses, and budget constraints (Fox, Anglin, Fromberg, & Grady, 1986). Again initial planning must address this concern if it is not to emerge later as a debilatating factor.

Several impediments within the public school arena have been found to crop up: "inflexibility and unalterability of school board approved budgets; resistance of high-level administrators to discuss possible projects and the impact of the latter with building principals and classroom teachers; inflexibility of teacher time and work responsibilities due to school procedures and union contract" (Fox, Anglin, Fromberg, & Grady, 1986, p. 4). Offerman (1986) identified a lack of institutional commitment and support as a major reason why consortia fail. In the study of academically

oriented consortia it was noted that, "...member institutions gave the consortia only limited support, and never gave direct funding. Hence, there was little ownership of consortia activities, though institutions were eager to claim full credit for the consortia's accomplishments" (Offerman, 1986, p. 1).

Each of the obstacles listed may not be able to be surmounted. However, in utilizing Hord's model which includes all involved factions in the initial planning stage, and in being aware of potential issues from the beginning, collaborative directors may be able to avoid some problem areas and anticipate other issues which invariably occur.

Recommendations

From this study of three collaborative projects and with support from recent literature on collaboratives, the following recommendations have been generated as important points to be addressed whenever embarking upon a collaborative project.

1. A joint assessment of public school needs and ability of the college/university to respond to the latter must occur prior to design.

2. Representatives of all collaborative parties--education and other relevant college departments, school adminstrators and teachers--must agree upon project goals, plan of work, implementation, and evaluation in the developmental stage of the proposal.

3. The Education Department and/or other relevant college departments must be prepared, in advance of project approval, to give faculty members either additional stipends and/or load credits if they chose to participate in the project.

4. The public schools must prepare its staff vis-a-vis the projected administrative and instructional impact of the forthcoming project.

5. The college/university must be committed to the collaborative ideal and provide financial support if necessary.

The five recommendations which have emerged from this study have growing support from various factions of the educational profession. This study has provided the means to pull these recommendations together based on practice, not just theory, further providing future collaborative with a basis on which initial planning should occur.

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